

# Tobacco Smoking and Vaping

Our organisation has a responsibility to keep everyone safe and healthy. That includes limiting workplace exposure to harmful substances. Cigarette smoke contains thousands of harmful chemicals, and vaping produces an aerosol that can contain nicotine and other potentially harmful substances. Both can affect indoor air quality and the health of others.

This toolbox talk refers to tobacco smoking and vaping. Tobacco contains nicotine, a highly addictive stimulant, as well as many other harmful chemicals. Vaping devices deliver nicotine through an inhaled aerosol rather than smoke. In most Australian states and territories, vaping is banned wherever cigarette smoking is prohibited.

**Did you know?**

**Tobacco smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in Australia and is the second-highest risk factor for disease burden (7.6%, excluding nicotine vaping) after overweight and obesity.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated to cause more than 24,000 deaths each year, or around 66 deaths per day.<sup>2</sup>**

**Since 2019, there has been an 11.3% increase in Australians reporting lifetime use of vapes.<sup>3</sup> Vaping is a major source of nicotine exposure and a growing public health concern.**

**E-cigarettes contain many chemicals that have the potential to harm human health. The long-term health effects of exposure to these chemicals through vaping is unknown and vapes have not been assessed to be safe.**

**Discussion Date**

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**Supervisor/Manager**

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**Workers' Names**

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**Immediate impacts of tobacco smoking include:**

- Reduced oxygen level in the blood
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Irritated airways and coughing
- Loss of appetite
- Second-hand smoke exposure.



# Ask for help if you are struggling to stop tobacco smoking or vaping



## Longer-term impacts of tobacco smoking include:

- Nicotine dependence<sup>4</sup>
- Increased risk of cardiovascular diseases including heart disease, stroke, and other blood circulation problems
- Increased risk of chronic respiratory diseases such as chronic bronchitis and emphysema
- Increased cancer risks, especially lung cancer
- Other health risks including type 2 diabetes, dental problems, vision loss, weakened immune system, and reproductive problems
- Premature ageing.<sup>4</sup>

## Known health impacts of vaping:

- Irritation to the mouth, throat, and airways
- Nausea, vomiting, exacerbating asthma, headache and dizziness
- Second-hand vapour exposure
- Possible risk of personal burns or other injuries, from hot devices, liquids, or malfunctioning batteries.<sup>5</sup>
- Increased risk of chronic lung conditions such as bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Ongoing nicotine addiction
- Higher risk of elevated blood pressure and heart disease
- Impaired concentration and the need for more frequent breaks, which is particularly relevant for safety-sensitive roles.<sup>5</sup>



As tobacco vaping is relatively new, evidence about health impacts is still emerging. New evidence is added monthly to [www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au](http://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au).

### Nicotine Poisoning

**Signs of nicotine poisoning can include nausea, vomiting, dizziness, confusion, headaches and a rapid heartbeat, with severe cases potentially causing breathing difficulties, seizures, or loss of consciousness.**

**In Australia, if nicotine poisoning is suspected, contact the Poisons Information Centre immediately on 13 11 26 for advice, and call 000 if the person has severe breathing difficulties, seizures or loss of consciousness.**



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## How does tobacco smoking and vaping impact the workplace?

- Absenteeism: Workers taking days off due to illness from tobacco smoking or vaping<sup>7</sup>
- Presenteeism: Workers being less productive due to their tobacco smoking or vaping<sup>7</sup>
- Distraction and reduced concentration: Nicotine addiction can cause cravings that make it harder to focus, increasing the risk of injury - especially when using power tools or operating heavy machinery<sup>4,5</sup>
- Fire risk: Smoking and vaping can increase the chance of fires, including from improperly extinguished smoking products and from vaping device batteries exploding, particularly around flammable materials<sup>7</sup>
- Second-hand smoke exposure: This can affect the health of smokers and people around them.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, chemicals released from tobacco smoke can become embedded in materials such as walls, carpet and furniture. This is often referred to as 'thirdhand smoke'.<sup>8</sup>

### Discussion topics

1. Where can you find information about your workplace policy on tobacco, vaping and other drugs?
2. What strategies are you aware of that help people to cut down or quit smoking or vaping?
3. What helps create a workplace where people feel comfortable asking for help or information about tobacco smoking or vaping?

## TOOLBOX TALK QUIZ – ANSWER SHEET (See QUESTIONS on next page)

1. **A** – Being more focused and able to help others on the job
2. **B** – Within minutes to days
3. **C** – Reduced oxygen in the blood
4. **B** – Pregnant employees and people with respiratory conditions
5. **B** – Higher risk of bronchitis or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
6. **A** – In carpets, walls, furniture and other surfaces long after the smoke has cleared
7. **B** – It is still too early to know all the long-term health impacts, and evidence continues to emerge

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## ✓ TOOLBOX TALK QUIZ – QUESTIONS (answers on previous page)



- 1. Which of the following is a benefit of quitting smoking or vaping that can support your workmates?**
  - A. Being more focused and able to help others on the job
  - B. Taking more unscheduled breaks
  - C. Not speaking on mute during video conferences
- 2. How soon can health improvements begin after quitting smoking?**
  - A. After about a decade
  - B. Within minutes to days
  - C. By the time you finish your morning cuppa
- 3. Which of the following is an immediate effect of smoking?**
  - A. Suddenly having the energy to fill out every near-miss report
  - B. Volunteering to clean out the work fridge
  - C. Reduced oxygen in the blood, which can make physical work feel harder
- 4. Which group is most vulnerable to smoke or vape exposure at work?**
  - A. Smokers only
  - B. Pregnant employees and people with respiratory conditions
  - C. People who keep reheating fish in the lunchroom
- 5. Which of the following can be a long-term effect of vaping?**
  - A. Volunteering to help the auditor
  - B. Higher risk of bronchitis or COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
  - C. Receiving complimentary lungs from HR
- 6. What is third-hand smoke?**
  - A. Tobacco smoke residue that can remain on carpets, walls, furniture and other surfaces long after smoking has stopped
  - B. Previously owned smoke with minor wear and tear
  - C. Tobacco smoke that becomes trapped inside smoke alarms like tiny nicotine escape rooms
- 7. What do we currently know about the long-term health impacts of vaping?**
  - A. Every future health impact has already been predicted by a vape horoscope app
  - B. It is still too early to know all the long-term health impacts, and evidence continues to emerge
  - C. Most of what we know comes from the colleague who read half an article once.

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## Resources

- Other WorkLife resources, toolbox talks and handouts:
  - [Fact Sheet on Vaping \(E-cigarettes\)](#)
  - [Fact Sheet on Tobacco Smoking](#)
- Drug and Alcohol Foundation – Vaping [adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/vaping/](https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/vaping/)
- Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing:
  - Smoking, vaping and tobacco [www.health.gov.au/topics/smoking-vaping-and-tobacco](https://www.health.gov.au/topics/smoking-vaping-and-tobacco)
  - About vaping and e-cigarettes [www.health.gov.au/topics/smoking-vaping-and-tobacco/about-vaping](https://www.health.gov.au/topics/smoking-vaping-and-tobacco/about-vaping)
- Cancer Council Victoria – Tobacco in Australia Facts & Issues [www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/](https://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au/)
- National Alcohol & Drug Knowledgebase (NADK) subsections on Tobacco, and E-Cigarettes and Vaping – [nadk.flinders.edu.au/kb](https://nadk.flinders.edu.au/kb)

## Supports

- **Check out** information on how to quit smoking and vaping from [www.health.gov.au/topics/smoking-vaping-and-tobacco/how-to-quit](https://www.health.gov.au/topics/smoking-vaping-and-tobacco/how-to-quit)
- **Get** online counselling services via [www.counsellingonline.org.au](https://www.counsellingonline.org.au) anonymous chat with Alcohol and Other Drug counsellors
- **Call** the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on **1800 250 015** for free and confidential advice
- **Call** Quitline **13 78 48 (13 QUIT)** for confidential telephone support on quitting. You can ask to speak to an Aboriginal Counsellor at the same number, and interpreter services are also available.
- **Visit** [quit.org.au](https://quit.org.au) for information on quitting or to request a call back
- **Download** the free My QuitBuddy app to help support you to quit smoking and vaping [www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/my-quitbuddy-app](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/apps-and-tools/my-quitbuddy-app)

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## References

This article draws on some secondary sources that summarise evidence. To access primary research studies, readers are advised to consult the reference lists of cited publications.

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